The Flowers of No Man's Land

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The Flowers of No Man's Land

by stereokem

Summary

> “What if it was me instead? What if I was the one who came to you with my hands full of blood? I’m not as blameless as Abigail, not by half. Would you do the same for me? Would you protect me as well, Dr. Lecter?”
>
> “Without hesitation.”

Notes

This is a slight remix of the scene (from 'Trou Normand') where Will accuses Hannibal of helping Abigail. When watching that scene, I was keen to notice the way Hannibal straightened his scalpel. Funny, how fics can be born of something so simple.

Unbeta'd, self-edited. And, as usual, it ended up being much longer than originally intended. This will probably be part of a series.

This scene contains what I have dubbed a "quasi" sexual assault.

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It was not often that Hannibal Lecter was at ease with another person.

Although, to say that he was *at ease* with Will Graham seemed to insinuate a whole slew of notions that weren't entirely true. And given Will's nature, it seemed unlikely that *anyone* could ever really feel comfortable around the younger man. Especially high-caste predators and such as himself – blending so easily into the woodwork of normalcy – could not afford to let their guard down. Will was all bloodhound, nostrils flared, coming in with teeth bared and hackles raised; it was impossible to be at ease with someone who set the blood to boil and seethe anticipatorily.

He would never feel at ease in Will's presence; not really.

It was more that he had grown *accustomed* to Will.

So accustomed, it seemed, that when the door opened and the aforementioned person stepped in, Hannibal did not feel an immediate need to move from behind his desk. At most, his drawing hand stilled its ministrations where it had been carefully shading the figure on the paper, and his ox-blood eyes slid from one fine subject to another.

Will's eyes were, unsurprisingly, everywhere but the doctor. Hannibal, as always, took in Will in his entirety: the ruffled clothes, the muss of dark, lushly curled hair; the wan face; a darker shade of purple under his eyes than before, a slight stagger in his movements, as if he were intoxicated – or, more likely, about to pass out from sheer exhaustion.

Hannibal catalogued all of this in the blink of an eye, and he politely greeted his guest in a level tone most befitting of a psychiatrist: "Will."

The not-FBI agent failed to answer, but took several sure steps into the office, as if it were his own—then his steps faltered, as if he was having second thoughts. Hannibal watched with calculating interest. It was always easier to decipher when Will was experiencing remarkable stress: looking people in the eye took such great effort on a normal basis, but in such instances as this he seldom raised his head, keeping his chin tucked into his chest. When Will finally did look up, the doctor hoped it was personal regard and not professional courtesy that forced Will to acknowledge him fully.

As it happened, it was neither.

No. Tonight Will Graham had a much stronger motivator: accusation.

Will always presented a tricky cocktail of emotions. Decoding the state of Will was something akin to detecting the hints and hues in a wine: woody, fruity, metallic, zesty, mellow; oak, copper, steel, cherry, chocolate. It never failed to excite him: Will was Hannibal's favorite bouquet. A familiar vineyard, a reverent year. He was volatile, predictably unpredictable and, above all, exquisite. Having the privilege of holding Will's gaze was like allowing a thimble-full into one's mouth and slowly, leisurely mulling around the flavor until every note was revealed.

Well: he never denied being a lush.

“Abigail Hobbs killed Nicholas Boyle.”

He did confess, reaching his hand out to straighten the scalpel with which he had sharpened his charcoal pencil was not a completely innocuous move. The wolfish snarl that made no sound but arose quite distinctly from Will’s throat had set off his own internal alarms. Reaching for the scalpel had been pure impulse, an instinctual reaction; anyone other than Will Graham might have, a few seconds later, found themselves playing jump-rope with their entrails. Given the words that had just been spoken to him, he thought this quite fair. Coming from someone else – or even locuted at someone else – that direct line of commentary might have been intended to shock; but, he reminded himself, this was Will. And in the World According to Will, Hannibal Lecter was a doctor: a rational, caring, and ethical man who could be trusted enough not to lie to Will Graham’s face and expect to get away with it.

So, he stayed his hand, and turned his reflexive move into a careful correction, ritualistically straightening the scalpel to lay parallel to his secondary, yet-unused charcoal utensil.

The reply he leveled back was a blow made with the full force of the one thing Will Graham could not see through: honesty. “I know.”

There was nothing in Will’s face that belied any feeling of shock or betrayal. All the same, Hannibal saw him bristle, even as the younger man carefully ran through his list: rational, ethical, caring, *doctor*—

“H— and *how* do you know?”

“I helped her dispose of the body.”

Rational.

Will swallowed thickly, and Hannibal drank in the site of his adam’s apple bob once. Will, having been unable to sustain a held gaze, did not notice, eyes cast on the floor as his trademark grimace-grin crawled over his worn features.

“Why?”

He had the slight urge to stand, to assert his authority subliminally; but if this were to work, to be convincing . . . he needed to play the game. Be the sheep. Bleat and stumble about aimlessly.

“It is true that Nicholas Boyle attacked Abigail Hobbs that night in Minnesota. It is true that she killed him in self-defense.”

At the phrase “self-defense” Hannibal saw Will’s shoulders loosen minutely, tension draining from his ever-thinning frame.

“But the manner in which she killed him would have made her innocence less than unbelievable.”

“You mean the way she—“ a pause, “—she eviscerated him.”

“Yes.”

“With one of her father’s knives.”

“Correct.”

“And you . . . “

“Did what I felt was necessary to protect Abigail.”

Ethical.

The moments of silence following were unsurprising, as Hannibal waited for Will to try and comprehend all of this—unsurprising, but not uninteresting, not *boring*. Instilling ennui was the height of rudeness; fortunately, Not-Special Agent Will Graham seemed to be almost incapable of such discourtesy. Will was always a treat to watch, even if Hannibal could give an uncannily informed play-by-play of each thought running through his mind.

It was difficult to dissuade the undertone of confidence in his voice when he asked, “Do I need to call my lawyer?”

Will did not answer for a moment, but turned himself away from Hannibal to face another cold but less manipulative surface than the doctor: the window. Will stared, perfectly in profile, and Hannibal could see the slight tremor in his neck, in the soft place just under his chin. It belied the terror of a man about to make a decision that defied all the rules by which he carefully constructed his fragile life.

Slowly, Will shook his head.

“No.”

Hannibal waited a moment. When he perceived that it was safe, he stepped closer to Will, intimating the space between them. The smell of Will wafted toward him, faint and earthy, smoke and petrichor.

“We are doing the right thing,” he said assuredly. He raised a hand, and placed it gently but firmly on Will’s shoulder. “For Abigail.”

The muscles in Will’s shoulder shifted under his palm, nervous fibers sliding past one another; he did not shy away, but nor did he look at Hannibal, continuing to stare out into the damp night outside the window.

“We are her fathers now. And we must strive to serve her better.”

Caring.

There was a hot temptation to keep his hand where it was on Will’s uneasy shoulder; but it seemed to Hannibal that tonight was not the eve he should try to push his tender luck. He slid

his hand from Will's shoulder, breaking their connection; but Will did not sigh in relief.

No. He surprised Hannibal then by dragging his eyes away from the window and fixing the doctor with a stare. It was uncertain, and edgy, as if it took Will great effort to direct his eyes; but it was also sullen, with faint notes of ire.

"She was supposed to be innocent."

The accusation was back in his voice, a sharp and biting aroma that matched the flinty stare; but this time, it was tinged with undertones of dolor that sailed through Hannibal's ears like music.

Hannibal shook his head, feigning sorrow. "We, none of us, are innocent, Will."

"But – " Will's voice broke off. He swallowed, throat bobbing. "I *needed* her to be."

"We cannot change what already is. We can only endeavor to move past it."

"To live with it."

He heard a single drop of rain hit the window.

"Yes."

"And is that your *professional* recommendation?"

His anger was like a misguided jab with a blunt needle, missing all major arteries with messy, irritating pinpricks. Hannibal was thinking again about the scalpel on his desk. He was thinking he should have hidden it up his sleeve. He was thinking that Will was more dangerous now than when there was a possibility of him turning Hannibal in. They had transgressed outside the arena of the involvement of proper authorities; whatever happened now was not taking place on American soil. This was No Man's Land. The law did not apply to either of them, had stopped applying to Will when the former had absolved Hannibal and Abigail of it.

And so, Hannibal was thinking about his scalpel. But more than the thought of needing something to defend himself, he wondered at what marvelous scent would arise from Will's tender flesh when—if – he had to cut the man open.

"You know as well as I that my actions here have not come from a place of professionalism."

Doctor.

He wondered how Will would interpret that admission. It was, quite possibly, one of them most dangerous confessions a physician could utter, especially for a psychiatrist— and to an unstable *de facto* patient, no less.

But, he felt utterly unendangered exposing himself in such a way to Will.

The FBI instructor gave him a look of incredulity, of loss.

"*Why?"*

"I care about Abigail," he said simply. It was the same tone which he used to help Will sort through the facts and impressions of his nightmares, and similarly nightmarish fantasies. "She is as much a victim of her circumstances as anyone, perhaps even more so. I would not impose upon her further suffering than she has already endured."

"But she *gutted* him!"

"As was instinctual for her to do," Hannibal returned, marveling at the new note of panic in Will's voice, high and transparent, like the clinking of glass. "Abigail has not had medical training, nor has she had defense experience. She has no, or little, knowledge of how to disempower someone, how to disable them simply to give herself enough time to run. She does not know where are the major arteries, and where a slice with a knife will only wound as opposed to kill. She has been trained to shoot, and to disassemble. When Nicholas Boyle approached her in his state of rage, her hands performed as her muscle memory bade them. You or I would have known how to knock the boy unconscious, how to disengage him."

"You mean the way you handled Alana."

There, again, the accusation; but this one was less sure of itself, and this was made more evident by the slight, almost imperceptible tremor that had begun to build itself up in Will's taught shoulders. Hannibal wanted to smile, almost did; only the years of practice of keeping such treasures to himself stopped him.

"Yes. Abigail was working from panic, not practice."

He had spoken at length, more than he'd intended to. What was he trying to accomplish? To instill in Will reason so that he might forgive Abigail, or to dissuade the horror growing in the man's eyes?

No. Hannibal spoke at length because he enjoyed being the focus of Will's shaky attention, because Will, of all people, could *see* him, even if he did not yet realize what he was looking at. The thick frames of Will's glasses slid over his eyes, an attempt to obscure them from view; but Hannibal had seen, and he knew that Will was watching him.

It was all he could do not to swell with pride and omnipotence, to let Will see him unfurl himself fully, naked and monstrous as Nature had made him.

Would it break him to bear witness to such a thing? Hannibal wondered. Or would he endure?

He seemed to be breaking now. The brunette enigma was shaking visibly, the bitter tremor slinking down his shoulders, into his forearms, his hands, his fingers. Hannibal took two very cautious steps closer, and saw that the roots of Will's thick mane was glistening with perspiration. He could very nearly smell the spike of adrenalin as he positioned himself closer, only a few feet apart now.

"So do I," Will whispered, and it was so low and so quiet Hannibal almost did not catch it. Will's blue-green eyes stared up at him like two bright wells of water and light, with shadows

dancing in the depths. “Getting inside the heads of these . . . these killers—that trick is old hat at this point, but the fear—the fear is new *every single time.*”

Will flushed and broke eye-contact.

“What is it that you fear, Will?”

“What if it was me instead? What if I was the one who came to you with my hands full of blood? I’m not as blameless as Abigail, not by half. Would you do the same for me? Would you protect me as well, Dr. Lecter?”

“Without hesitation.”

Will’s face crumpled. He let out a strangled sound, something between a mirthless laugh and a dry sob. He shook like the ground during an earthquake.

“*Why?* Why would you—?”

And then Hannibal had seen his chance, had closed the distance between them to take Will by the arm and gently but firmly lead him to the settee. He made the younger man sit, almost pushing him down onto the grey cushions. When he was certain that Will would not bolt, Hannibal lowered himself down to sit as well. His hands never left Will, merely moved from his arm to his wrists, then his hands. Will gripped back tightly, trying to anchor himself. His breath was coming in short, hiccupping gasps, and he was blubbering nonsense, his shaking growing all the more violent. It looked like the start of a seizure, or like he might already be having one. In any case, he was losing his grip on the moment and Hannibal wanted him to be present for this. So, one limb at a time, he wrapped both of his arms around Will and pressed him to his chest.

This, Hannibal thought, is perhaps what a spider feels when it is enveloping its prey in sticky silk, feeling its dying tremors pulse against fine webbing and soft underbelly. It was heavenly. And avernal.

Hannibal wanted to preserve that feeling, to stay undersea, linger in the ocean with this drowning man.

But it had to end; all things did. Only it felt too . . . *sudden* to Hannibal. In very little time—barely a few minutes, it seemed—Will’s pervasive shaking came to a complete and abrupt halt.

There was something about this that unsettled Hannibal immediately. There was no slow or subtle wind-down; the shaking did not decrease by degrees and slowly fade into stillness. No, the onset of Will’s motionlessness came swiftly into his arms. It was like holding a wounded convulsing animal, attempting to bring it back to calm—only to have it die without warning in his arms.

Will went very, very still.

One of Hannibal's hands was frozen where it had begun to card gently through Will's hair, long fingers nestled in the dark curls. He wanted to curl his hand tightly and pull—but all of his animal instincts have taken over him now, and they bade him be as still as the man he was holding.

Three droplets of water hit the window.

When Will pulled back, the look in his eyes made Hannibal's breath catch in his throat and the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end.

Blue eyes had dilated to twice their normal size which, in the dim light of the office, meant that there was almost no iris left, just a large pit of black with a faint sparkling rim of cerulean. His expression was fathomless, both burning and cold—precisely the same expression a jungle cat wore when it had suddenly spied its prey and sat back on its haunches, watchful and waiting. It was foreign on Will's face, distorted his features until he was barely recognizable. The transformation was awesome to behold, an as he stared back, the bright slice of a blade flitted through Hannibal's mind.

Will shifted. Cautiously, Hannibal let his arms drop from around the younger man's shoulders, never breaking eye-contact as he lowered his hands back to the soft grey cushions of the settee.

Slowly, Will shifted forward, positioning himself closer, his face just a few inches from Hannibal's. He brought one hand up and over Hannibal's shoulder, reaching around to cover the back of the doctor's neck where it sat, warm and heavy. The move surprised Hannibal: it was possessive, a display of dominance over another. Not something he had thought Will capable of.

(Not just yet).

In his periphery, he heard the sound of rain thudding steadily against the window.

Hannibal barely had time to register the tensing of muscle before Will was almost launching himself at the doctor, pushing him until he was lying back on the couch. Will's hands were hot, and seemed to sear through the fabric of Hannibal's jacket, his waistcoat, his shirt. Will was pinning him down, and it took all of Hannibal's considerable self-control to make himself not retaliate, to remain *still*.

Because the balance of power had shifted between them. It transferred deftly from Hannibal to Will, and Hannibal felt it physically. Will had taken control of the situation.

Hannibal was curious to see what he would do with it.

Will hunched over him, not quite covering Hannibal's body with his own but hovering just above. His hands scrambled to find Hannibal's wrists, and he pressed them against the cushions. Will's grip was brittle and unpracticed, but it thrilled Hannibal all the same. He made no movement and stared up at the ceiling as Will pressed his face into Hannibal's shoulder, nuzzling, poking his warm nose at the exposure of flesh just above Hannibal's stiff collar, inhaling deeply—*smelling* him.

Hannibal swallowed slowly and Will's grip on his wrists tightened painfully, as if in response.

And then, there was a slow, sharp slide of teeth at his earlobe.

He was unable to contain the soft grunt of pain and surprise as Will bit down on the soft flesh. It was then that Will finally pressed down, almost rutting into Hannibal as his grip grew, if possible, even tighter. There was no doubt in Hannibal's mind that he would bear bruises from that grasp.

Will let out a low sound and licked at the lobe, as if in apology, and the act was so animal that Hannibal began to wonder if Will was in full possession of all of his faculties. Had he slipped away somewhere?

Without expanding his chest, Hannibal inhaled deeply. Even Will's scent had changed. There was something sharp about it now, acidic, slightly vinegary. Mouthwatering. Hannibal swallowed, his Adam's apple brushing against the flannel of Will's shirt. Will was worrying the skin of his neck now with finely pointed canines, circling his chin, stubbled jaw dragging against stubbled jaw.

Hannibal kept his eyes open and fixed upward, but the ceiling was soon eclipsed by Will's face. the younger man assaulted his mouth, sucking and kneading with his teeth more than kissing. The full length of his body was pressing into Hannibal desperately now, and Hannibal felt the unmistakable sign of arousal against his right thigh—and *that* was surprising. Will swiped at Hannibal's bottom lip with his tongue, asking, no, demanding, and Hannibal opened his mouth in unresisting acquiescence.

He wondered vaguely how long this would continue. How far he would let it go. In his desire to get at Hannibal's neck, Will had pulled away his collar, nearly ripping it, and all but torn his tie from his neck. And now, as Will continued his desperate ministrations to Hannibal's pliant mouth, his feverish hands were undoing the last buttons of his waistcoat and pushing it aside, fingers pressing against the curves of Hannibal's muscular chest. Would Will divest him of clothing entirely? In all his wisdom and insight, he had not pegged Will for one who indulged in sodomy. Until recently, he had not viewed Will as a sexual creature, had thought perhaps that the man may not have been capable of carnal desire at all. But, he thought fondly, Will was always surprising him.

Hannibal could be surprising too.

As one of Will's hands was fumbling to free Hannibal's undershirt from his trousers, one of Hannibal's previously pinned hands was free. Swiftly, Hannibal reached up to cup Will's face. Gently but firmly, he clutched the younger man's chin in the cradle between his thumb and index finger, stilling his mouth. Before Will could fight him, Hannibal closed their lips together in a sound, proper kiss.

Will went deathly still again—surprised into stillness, Hannibal thought. No matter. Hannibal took the opportunity to press their mouths together in an almost chaste way, his jaw sliding slowly from one kiss to the next.

After a long moment, Will's body sagged. He sighed softly and sweetly into Hannibal's mouth and the hand that had been pinning Hannibal's other wrist fell loose, allowing Hannibal to bring both hands to Will's head, one keeping at his jaw to guide it, one sliding up from the base of his skull.

It was as gentle as any kiss he could have bestowed. He ceased to think of sharp metal, but instead of densely wooded thickets and trees dripping with the last of winter snow, and streams that rippled and laughed quietly in the midst of it all—

A shot rang out.

With a veritable *bang*, Will wrenched himself away. He hastily pulled off Hannibal and stood on shaky legs to put at least five feet distance between them.

Reacting quickly, Hannibal swept himself up from the settee. He did not bother to rectify his clothing, but instead focused all of his attention on Will, who was visibly trembling before him, pale as a sheet and looking beyond horrified.

Intriguing.

"Will," Hannibal called to him, his voice calm and reasonable. He reached out and took a step forward.

"No!" Will jumped back as if Hannibal had lunged at him. He was breathing hard and he wouldn't look Hannibal in the eyes, locking his gaze around the psychiatrist's messily untucked shirttails, his expression growing more fearful and embarrassed by the second. Hannibal could hear the thoughts buzzing through his mind like the cacophonous, disjointed voices of a hive—

Caring, rational, ethical, doctor, ***friend***—

Hannibal retracted his hand, but exchanged it for a firmer tone. "William—"

"No, I— I'm sorry. I have to—go."

Before Hannibal could utter another word Will whirled around, banged open the door of Hannibal's office, and fled.

Hannibal stared after him through the open door for a long moment.

It was only when he was able to shake himself from reverie that he noticed Will had left his jacket.

The garment had been haphazardly dropped on the back of one of Hannibal's interviewing chairs when Will first entered. It had not been raining then as it was now, and the rough wool fabric was dry to the touch. He gathered the fabric close to his face and inhaled deeply; instantly, it was as though Will were back in the room with him. The same acrid smell of fear, the fevered sweetness of encephalitis, growing stronger every day it seemed; he smelled coffee and mint toothpaste, and a very faint hint of bourbon; and somewhere, lying in wait underneath it all, was the cloying, heady scent of arousal.

Hannibal hummed to himself. Had Will been aroused when he came here? Or did he carry it with him at odd moments?

What, exactly, had happened?

Carefully laying the garment back down, Hannibal set about righting his clothing and smoothing back his hair, permitting himself a miniscule smile. There was never any telling with Will; he would have to wait and see.

His ensemble thus corrected, Hannibal strode back to his desk and resumed position over his sketching. Picking up both charcoal and scalpel, he sharpened his instruments and set back to work.

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